

CHRISTIAN DRAMA



WINTER 1960

THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY

of Great Britain

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AND MRS. OLIVE STEVENSON

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All opinions expressed in these pages are personal, and are not necessarily those of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain.

EDITORIAL

The full name of our society is The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain. Our proper concern for what happens in this island must not make us become insular in the wrong way. We do poor service to ourselves and to the development of Christian drama in all its aspects if we ignore what is happening in other parts of the world. Britain has a long theatrical tradition which should encourage us to be at once willing to teach and anxious to learn. Members may have some views about the place of R.D.S. in the international scene and may like to express them in another issue of this magazine. In this issue we have given a good deal of space to the international conference held at Royaumont last July. One of the lectures given there has been included and we hope to print another later. A conference of this kind requires much organization and cannot be held very often. This makes it most important that its influence should be spread as widely as possible.

As part of our concern with Christian drama abroad we are printing a member's impressions of a play by a foreign author, which has attracted some attention in this country. Other members may like to share their experiences in this way. To think from time to time about what is happening in other countries may remind us once again of the unifying force of drama. The reports from the conference tell us how different denominations are encouraging the writing and production of plays on Christian themes. The Ecumenical Movement is trying to restore the unity that should be a mark of Christian witness in the world. Here too R.D.S. may have a part to play.

It is hoped that the next issue will contain articles on the writing and choice of plays.

LONDON THEATRE

FRANCES GLENDENNING

This article is about Arnold Wesker and his three plays, *Chicken Soup with Barley*, *Roots* and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem*. Other plays and other authors may have shouted more loudly for our attention but Mr. Wesker and his work have a peculiar place in the theatre and rather unusual ramifications in society.

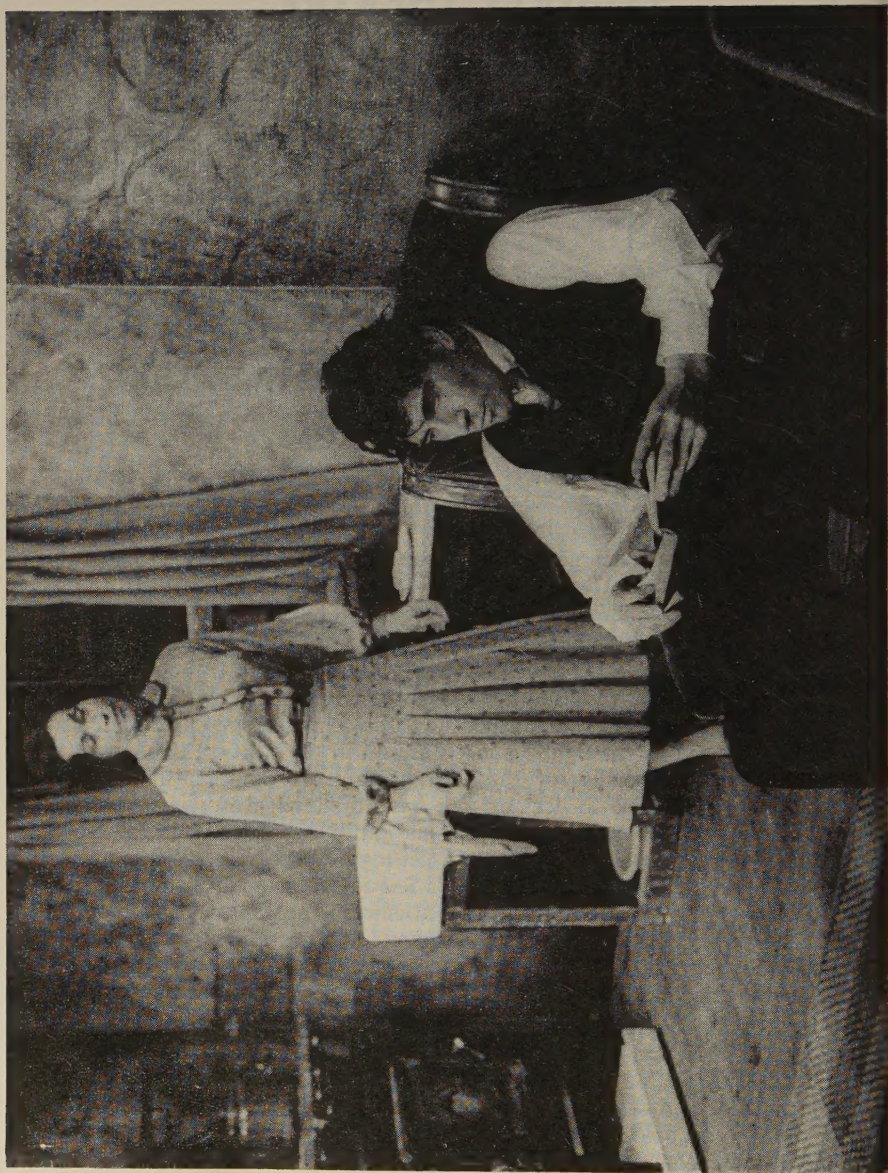
The first notable and impressive fact about this author is his industry. *Chicken Soup with Barley* was completed and produced in 1958, *Roots* in 1959 and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem* in 1960. All first productions were at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry but between June and September, 1960, the three plays were produced as a trilogy at the Royal Court Theatre in London. (The trilogy has since been published by Jonathan Cape Ltd. at 25s.) This is no small achievement for a man who was born in 1932.

The three plays are each complete in themselves but form a trilogy whose connecting links are in the theme and the characters. The Greeks achieved dramatic trilogies but in English drama it is a very rare species.

All three plays are concerned with comparatively recent history. *Chicken Soup with Barley* covers the period 1936-1956, *Roots* is set in 1957 and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem* 1947-1959. In all three plays, the theme is social and political movements and changes as they affect one particular family. One of Mr. Wesker's great gifts is the ability to indicate a very large wood by taking a close look at a few of the trees.

Chicken Soup with Barley introduces the Kahn family, a Jewish East End household engaged in the fight against Fascism in the thirties. The most effective weapon, especially for Mrs. Sarah Kahn, is Communism. Her husband pays lip service to her zeal but has no stomach for violence or, indeed, for any decisive action. While his family and friends are at the barricades, he slips off on the excuse of "getting the sandwiches" and goes to his mother's for a cup of tea. Sarah's fervour is channelled into interminable tea making, exhortation and vain attempts to scold her husband out of his criminal indifference. She is a warm and sympathetic character with a depth of feeling that can stretch beyond her family. Harry's weakness is hidden by his gaiety, his good looks, his capacity for being "good company".

By the second act the Spanish Civil war is almost forgotten, the Second World War is over and the Kahns have been rehoused in an L.C.C. flat in Hackney. They no longer have a common enemy to unite them. Harry has succumbed to a stroke and his physical helplessness and dependence begin to match his growing mental surrender. Sarah continues to carry him and suffers more from her daughter's "abdication" from the political struggle and from her son's growing disillusionment in the old political ideals. The final scene is a tense conflict between mother and son. To Sarah it is the fight for her son's life. She has seen the living death of her husband and



cannot bear the signs of cynicism and apathy in her son. Finally she cuts through all his logic and objections with a desperate appeal "You'll die, you'll die . . . if you don't care, you'll die!"

The central figure in *Roots* is Ronnie Kahn. He never appears but his life and thought are revealed by Beatie Bryant, the Norfolk girl who has been living with him in London and who has been his disciple. She has returned to prepare her family for his first visit and the mixture of admiration and exasperation that she feels for him brings them both very much to life.

The curtain rises on a Norfolk farm cottage with the wife waiting for her husband to come home from work. The tempo barely increases with his arrival and the contrast with the opening bustle and activity of the Kahn household cannot escape notice. Beatie's entry into her sister's household creates quite a stir as she talks of her life in London. Many of her sentences begin, "Ronnie says," "Ronnie thinks," "Ronnie doesn't like". . . . She is full of mental and physical energy and falls to work on her sister's untidy cupboards.

It is the same when she goes to her parents' house—talking, cooking, taking a bath, playing her records. Her mother is forced to admit that she brings a bit of life to the place. Not everything is plain sailing. How her mother resents being "talked at" by Beatie as obviously Beatie has been "talked at" by Ronnie! As the curtain falls on Act II Beatie is dancing off some of her surplus energy after having given her mother a lecture on musical appreciation à la Ronnie, and somehow mother and audience are infected not only with her gaiety but also with her convictions. At this point we get a glimpse of what Ronnie is really after. We lose all sense of his pomposity and priggishness of which Beatie has made us indirectly aware, and are caught up in her enthusiasm and admiration for someone who is free from many of the shams and shibboleths of society and who has a certain integrity of mind and purpose.

The last act finds the table spread and the family gathering together to meet the famous Ronnie. The alternating stiff silences, ribald jokes, incipient quarrels and small talk are marvellously done leading up to the postman's knock. Whatever private feelings one may have about the "star" system, one can only be grateful for Joan Plowright's handling of the letter which brings the news that Ronnie will not come, that their life together is over. No doubt the "star" is even more grateful to the author for providing some of the most real and moving lines in the theatre to-day. These lines convey Beatie's humiliation and despair out of which grows a new Beatie, no longer a parasite on Ronnie but a new creature, aware of herself and her potentiality. "Did you listen to me? . . . I'm not quoting no more. . . . I'm beginning on my own two feet—I'm beginning. . . ."

To watch a human being becoming human is an awe-inspiring experience. Mr. Wesker has the sure touch which can convey both the dignity and the wonder, the awe and the excitement of Beatie's transfiguration, without a trace of sentimentality or pomposity. To be truly human, to have life and to have it abundantly are themes which run right through the trilogy.

I'm Talking about Jerusalem has Ada and Dave as its central figures, a young married couple who have had a vision, a glimpse of the fullness of

life and who are eager to preserve it. Ada is a Kahn, Ronnie's sister; her husband fought in the Spanish war and in the second world war and 1947 finds them moving house from London to Norfolk. Dave is to be carpenter on an estate and to make furniture in his spare time, a kind of William Morris socialism.

The last act of the play, in 1959, finds them moving back to London. Has their experiment failed? Has the time come for their family and friends to say "I told you so?" What is the hope for humanity? These questions are not academic nor are they confined exclusively to Ada and Dave. Just as Beatie fills us with a divine dissatisfaction with the "third rate" so Ada and Dave remind us of our doubts, perhaps long silenced, about the possibility of becoming truly human in an industrial society. Mr. Wesker makes us care about the people in his plays but the caring does not come to an end with the final curtain.

Mr. Wesker is a good example of a playwright who has something to say and for whom drama is the clearest means of saying it. It is said that he never went to the theatre much before he began writing and he obviously has the deepest regret that some people still find it possible to say that the theatre is "only for the nobs". It is perhaps easier to say this in the East end of London than in the East end of other British cities where the theatre is not such a notable convention of the West end.

Mr. Wesker's plays are not biographical although they certainly represent a distillation of his experience of growing up in a Jewish family in the East end of London and of marrying into a non-Jewish Norfolk family. One of his dramatic triumphs is to convince largely "middle class" audiences that "working class" characters on the stage are not inevitably comics. He has a warmth and unpretentious seriousness which are part of his unerring gift for making characters real.

It is irresistible to compare Mr. Wesker with a mythical Christian playwright who we feel ought to be able to write just this kind of play only rather better. After all Christians are supposed to know about love and caring for people and redeeming society. But at this stage of history, our faith often seems to be the millstone round our necks (whether we are playwrights, parsons or just Christian people) rather than the liberation from fear and bondage and vested interests. Our faith seems to put us on the defensive rather than to open our hearts and minds to new truth and new people.

The Christian playwright too often seems to be more concerned with satisfying (or not offending) certain theological canons or authorities (the R.D.S. for example?) rather than with creating living people to fill his stage. He rarely risks writing a three act play as his characters can barely keep going for one, he does not love them enough for them to develop a life of their own. Although he usually takes colossal risks in confronting Christians with non-Christians, they rarely come to life and the points at issue between them belong more to a debate than to a development of character. The Christian playwright falls over backwards to use just the right quantity of religious language in just the most significant places. He is aware of the danger of being misunderstood, of alienating his audience by using a "foreign"

language, he is on the defensive. He does not compel the critic to use religious languages to comment on his plays.

Mr. Wesker's plays give such an impression of warmth and life and fearlessness that biblical phrases such as "new life", "transfiguration" come automatically to mind. His plays are far removed from those of Harold Pinter or Ionesco, they are written to be "understood of the people". Because he has such a keen eye and ear for a dramatic situation, and has the art of breathing life into the dry bones of his characters, his zeal for "new life" is kept within dramatic bounds. Has he a "message"? He has said that anyone who writes anything must say something. We might add that anyone who has the courage to address the T.U.C. on the subject of drama must have something to say. In the trilogy he recognises the profound part played by politics in the lives of the underprivileged but politics are never the final arbiter or sole criterion of values in his family's affairs. Although he holds strong views and convictions, his work never gives the impression of someone who is confined within a rigid system of thought. On the contrary his characters take their life and strength from him, and it is their freedom which gives the plays their power to transcend a mere family chronicle.

Mr. Wesker carries a modest torch for all those who care for things of good report in the theatre. At this stage of history, it is often writers who would not describe themselves as religious who best serve the cause of true religion.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AT ROYAUMONT

The importance of this Conference is so great that it could well fill a whole issue or two of *Christian Drama*. From the mass of reports, discussions and lectures we have selected a few things that may interest our readers. Carina Robins reports in general on the Conference, which she did so much to make possible. The countries represented sent reports of recent activities; space allows only a few sentences from each. Thus we offer a little symposium of distinctive forms or new viewpoints on Christian drama from many parts of the world. There is material here for many discussions. Finally, a few of the most important conclusions reached at the Conference are reproduced.

"THE ANSWER"

By PHOEBE M. REES

A simple one-act play for women, set in the house of St. Mark on the night of Peter's escape from prison.

For their performance of this play, The Fulwood Townswomen's Guild were awarded "The Henry Spencer Trophy" in the Preston Drama Festival, and the Woolavington W.I. the "Endeavour Cup" in the Somerset County Festival.

"I found the performance of this play very moving." George Brandt, Lecturer in Drama at Bristol University.

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CHRISTIAN DRAMA FROM MANY COUNTRIES

CARINA ROBINS

The purpose of this Conference which was held at Royaumont near Paris for five days in July was to continue the work begun at the Oxford Conference in 1955. Its aim was to bring together Christians of many nationalities and denominations who are concerned with the promotion of modern religious drama in various ways. It was made possible through the generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation of New York and the Cultural Fund of the Council of Europe.

Fifty delegates came from twenty countries, including the U.S.A. and the Dominions, Great Britain and most of Western Europe, Greece, India and Japan. From the Ecumenical point of view, something almost unique was achieved, not even attained by the World Council of Churches, for the delegates included Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Greek Orthodox and Protestants.

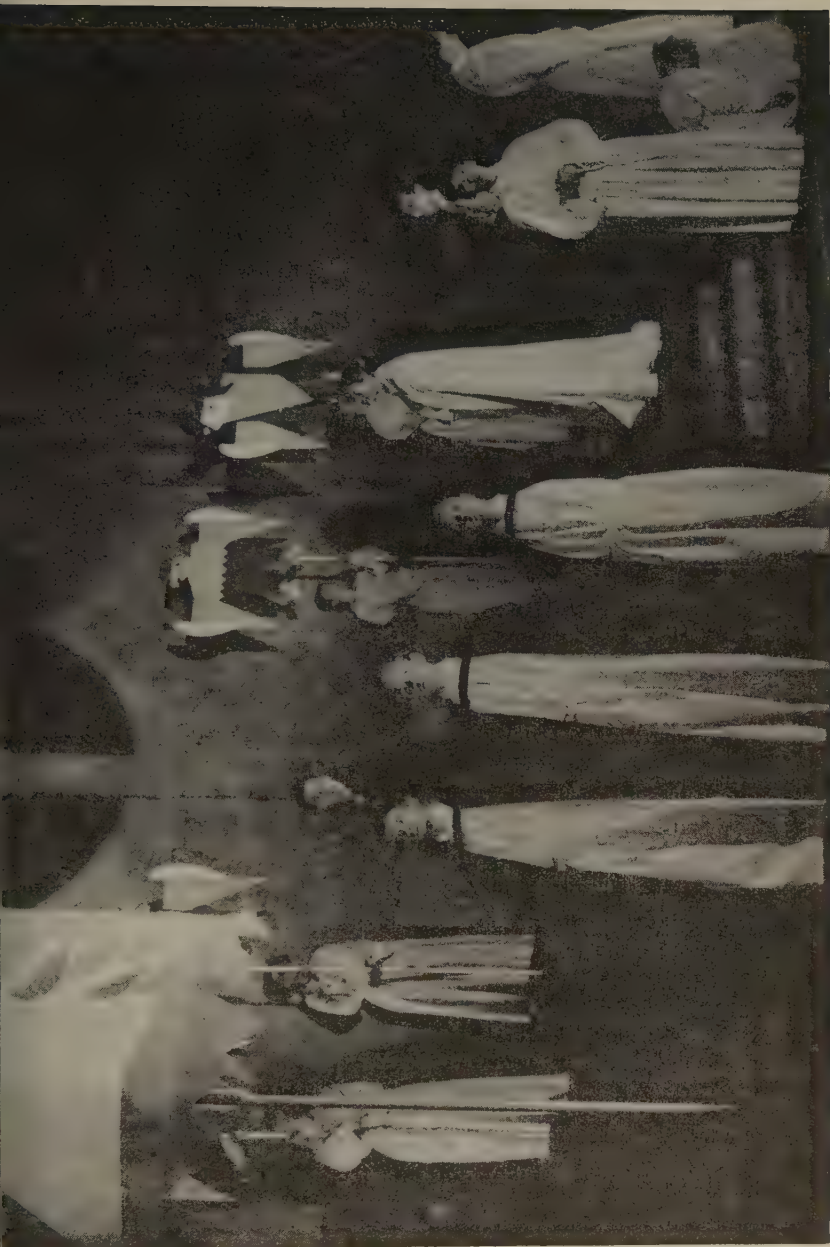
The Conference Chairman was Mr. Martin Browne, who gave the opening address; he was assisted by Mr. Robert Speaight who chaired the morning lectures. The Rev. Père Jean Mambrino gave an illuminating lecture on "Christian Drama in the Theatre", Mr. Tuve Nyström spoke on the unique form of "Liturgical Drama" which has been evolved by Dr. Hartman at Sigtuna, Sweden, and Professor Tom F. Driver from Union Theological Seminary, New York, gave a stimulating lecture on "The Church, The Theatre, and The World".

Plays were presented in the evenings as examples of contemporary Christian drama, showing great diversity of style. For instance there was the demonstration of Swedish liturgical drama, there were a variety of plays from France, Germany, Belgium and Great Britain, and the most modern of all, a ten-minute play from U.S.A.

Both lectures and plays gave rise to lively discussions in which professional theatre directors, playwrights and amateur producers contributed.

From the organiser's point of view it was heartening to see the work of two years suddenly come alive, to have the opportunity of talking to keen Christian minds of many cultures, and to realize the contribution made by the delegates from Greece, India and Japan, which countries had not been represented at Oxford.

The closing session which is reported elsewhere in this journal made very clear that the delegates had no intention of letting things rest, but were determined that this international development of religious drama must go on, for it had and would increasingly have a valuable contribution to make towards the unity of nations within the Body of Christ.



THE FIERY FURNACE BY OLOV HARTMAN (SICTUNA, SWEDEN)

REPORTS FROM ROYAUMONT

Australia

When Australians visit the living theatre, they don't go for any of the good reasons other than to be mildly amused. The crisp production of a serious play which can have a hearing in many European cities is not a part of our Australian way of life.

So our Australian group haven't been content to stay in a theatre and gently hint to the great public at large that they don't know what they're missing.

We've tried to find suitable times for catching our audiences: performances for City workers soon after leaving their offices, Sunday afternoons, some colleagues in a Melbourne church group have met with great success with lunch-hour seasons.

In the last few years we've gone into people's homes by medium of that remarkable and distressing thing called television.

Austria

Passion Plays in the Oberammergau style, naturally on a smaller scale, are played not only in the old Tyrolean Passion Play villages of Thiersee and Erl, but also in Upper Austria, Lower Austria and Burgenland. Village drama groups vie with one another and aspire to performing in quite reasonable theatres. It cannot be said that they exist only to serve the tourist trade; they often achieve a really high standard.

Plays which, as far as I know, are only to be found in Austria, and in fact only there in the county of Steiermark, are Biblical Room Plays, which are performed by peasants in their own homes, privately and to the exclusion of all strangers, according to ancient dialogue handed down by word of mouth. For this, a special kind of local chant, half singing half speaking, is used.

Belgium

Attention should be drawn to the opening of a new Catholic college, whose aim is to train Christian artists, as producers and directors, in the theatre, the cinema, radio and television: the Broadcasting Arts College (l'Institut des Arts de Diffusion).

This college comprises two departments: one department dealing with cinema-, radio- and TV-production, and a department dealing with theatre. The subjects taught are designed to form a man, a complete man, and particular attention is given to making him capable in the humanist and educational domains, in the aesthetic and moral domains.

There can be no doubt that the existence of this school is favourable to the development of a professional Catholic theatre in the near future, and of a cinema industry with a Christian bias.

Denmark

Now and then we must face the problem of professional actors who want to perform their church plays in churches. In this question there are two difficulties. The first difficulty is that it is almost impossible to avoid mixing

idealistic, economic, and business points of view. The second difficulty is that it is impossible to maintain the fundamental idea that church plays must be performed on initiative from the Church. If church plays are to be a piece of ecclesiastical work in the service of the Gospel the principle that the initiative must originate from the Church must be maintained.

France

The movement of our contemporary theatre is very largely anti-Christian. If I decline a theatre engaged in Christian thought, it is for aesthetic motives. But it is also a matter of intellectual loyalty, of not judging with two sets of weights and measures.

Moreover, those who will be inclined to attack this attitude of impartiality, and judgment, in the name of their defence of Christian proselytism, ought first to admit that the instructional theatre cannot convince any but the already convinced, that the hostile retain their position, indeed digging themselves in, and that sometimes in trying to prove too much we do not strictly prove anything. It is from excessive zeal which goes against that which it wishes to serve, and this danger awaits especially Christian drama: the sermon, before the play, has already been the victim of it.

Great Britain

In recent months the principal concern of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain has been with the problem of communication to those outside the Christian Church and to nominal Christians within the Churches. We have felt that, on the whole, Religious Drama has tended to be preoccupied either with revivals of ancient forms, or with the conventional edification of the faithful, or with a highly sophisticated interpretation of the faith, which has little meaning for ordinary citizens in the twentieth century.

We have therefore been searching for dramatists prepared to write scripts which will attempt to relate the central doctrines of Christianity to current affairs, and which will arouse discussion, rather than to give ready-made answers to religious questions.

Greece

The problem which we, as dramatists, directors or producers in the Christian theatre, often find ourselves faced with, is this: should one give preference to the Biblical or non-Biblical theatre?

A biblical subject can serve as real theatre if the characters are shown in a new light, if the problems confronting them take on an eternal, and consequently a present-day aspect, and if the words and the atmosphere are suffused with poetry.

Christian plays dealing with contemporary problems are easier for the dramatist; they have a more direct influence on the audience, and they make more appeal to the indifferent spectator who puts up a sort of inner resistance to biblical subjects. But the dramatist must be fired with enthusiasm, he must be alert and aware of the message of our times.

Holland

The improvised acting of Bible stories by adults does not directly belong under Religious Drama—there is no acting before a public, and the standard need not be at all high aesthetically. Yet it is used more and more in the so-called *vormingswerk* (work with lay people). The point is to find a form in which a certain text from the Bible can be acted.

The members of the parish who assemble—about fifteen to thirty persons—are told by the group leader which part of the Bible will be the subject. They are divided into groups, and each group has to make a play about it. The results of their preparations are shown to each other, and make a starting point for the Bible discussion which follows. Through acting, many things become surprisingly clear, real experience of the event is possible. Besides, any misunderstanding of the text becomes more clear in the acting.

Iceland

When a church play was performed at the church of Bessastaoir two years ago, it was a start without a tradition. It was the first experiment of this kind in our country. Our church-people do not regard the theatre as something sinful or ungodly, and many religious plays have been exceedingly well received. However, the idea of performing a play within a church was not accepted by everybody, and there were clergymen and congregational boards who did not like to take part in such an experiment. It was very interesting to notice that opinions regarding the matter did not follow any special theological lines, nor did people of the same group or church-political party take the same attitude.

India

We have been experimenting with the idea of using dance and mime to portray Bible Stories. Such theatrical presentation of mythological stories is an integral part of the Hindu culture and the dance masters were very enthusiastic and chose the stories they thought could most easily be portrayed. The story of the Ten Virgins was danced to the songs and music set by Rabindranath Tagore in the traditional Bengali style—with Bengali costumes and sung in the original language. There was a solemnity and depth of meaning in the performance and the participating children—nearly all of whom were non-Christians—felt they were giving a message to the audience.

Italy

Modern choral drama must not be understood as a “chorus” drama, nor in the operatic meaning as a gathering of people who sing together, nor in the most frequent meaning in “culture engagée” circles as popular drama which is going to put many people on the stage. The Chorus is very simply the audience or the crowd who take part in the dramatic action while staying in their seats in the hall. The aim of the theorists of choral playwriting is to rouse the public from its contemplative sloth and to make it participate in the drama in the most direct way.

The author of European renown who has best understood these problems, while confining them within a conventional system, and who has indicated what is understood by open “choral” participation, has been Diego Fabbri, whose *Processo a Gesu* attempts to establish the death of Christ as a striking reality for our time.

Japan

There are numerous devoted Christians who are making praiseworthy efforts to spread the Faith to the masses, who are for the most part indifferent to the problems of religion.

More especially, since the second World War, in the course of which the Japanese underwent so many extremely painful experiences, they are beginning to face up to the problem of religion seriously and with ardour.

Recently, playwrights, writers, directors, actors and producers, all of them Christians, have formed a group aimed at trying, by the medium of the play, to prove the existence of God. It is the first really serious attempt made by Japanese Christians without the aid or intervention of the Church and the missionaries.

Luxembourg

By the religious societies theatre (patronised theatre) of the denominational youth clubs and of the Christian school and student clubs, German and French legends, dramas of Christmas, and above all, plays about the Mother of God are acted. Then the national authors who write in German or in the dialect of Luxembourg are also included in the project.

The Differdinger Open-Air Passion Play, which since the last World War has been given a variety of performances, aims at creating something individualistic with its huge spectacular scenes.

After these performances, which are either directed by or influenced by the Church, comes the literary religious theatre performed by various amateur companies.

Norway

Both Oslo and Bergen groups consist mostly of amateurs, both actors and those behind the scenes, but we could do with some professionals.

What is needed now, are some church drama workers and producers who have studied church plays in other countries, to come here with new ideas.

It can be said that there is some interest in ecclesiastical quarters, but this is somewhat limited. And we *simply have not* the financial support we need. The cost of presenting and rehearsing church plays is high, because the quality must be high. Poorness in quality would doom the idea of church plays to death.

Sweden

Since 1955 the movement started by the Association for Liturgy and Drama has grown to something like a revival. There are now between 5,000–6,000 “Church players” in Sweden, operating in small groups. The actors are trained in a liturgical style which enables young amateurs to act with artistic simplicity and yet demands a great deal from our best professional actors. This style has also created new possibilities for professionals and amateurs to work together.

A useful result is the biblical mime, which was born in a course for “Church players” and now is spreading over Sweden.

Switzerland

We should like to pay special attention to the religious amateur performance, more especially since pleasure in the People's Theatre belongs to an old Swiss tradition, which finds expression in the most varied forms in the Little Theatre Movement.

In our annual courses for amateur actors in various towns, instituted in 1955, which have proved very popular, we have found a task, the fulfilment of which will greatly benefit the communal life of the Church and will, as time goes on, put at our disposal an increasing number of trained actor-missionaries of both sexes, having the right spiritual approach. With them we shall be able to embark upon bolder theatrical ventures.

United States

In spite of the cleavage between the church and the theatre in America, Protestant churchmen also have long recognized the values of drama, especially in Christian education. But, unfortunately, as a result of abusive practices in which drama as an art form often was subverted to serve other ends, a wide separation opened between those who respected the form as well as the content and those who did not. Happily, to-day, the distance which formerly separated the two is being closed. There are unmistakable evidences of co-operation between the educator and the dramatist within the church which augur well for the future.

The cultivation of playwrights is the most important, the most difficult, and the slowest job which "religious drama" in America must undertake. To meet the challenge some of the denominations are commissioning plays to be written for major conferences and assemblies.

POINTS FROM THE CLOSING SESSION

The Chairman opened the session by asking delegates to consider in precise terms the value of this Conference, to decide whether any form of international liaison on religious drama should continue in the future, and if so, to propose means by which it could be financed. Several delegates then spoke warmly of the Conference, of the fellowship of interchange between those with common creative interests and differing points of view. They spoke of the loneliness of this kind of work, and felt that a real contribution had been made towards the One Church that all longed to see. This willingness of all denominations to meet, and the degree of unity within the Body of Christ was new and heartening.

Mr. Robert Seaver (U.S.A.) urged the appointment of a small carefully chosen committee, both to investigate possible sources of money, and to spend some considerable time in preparing the programme, including perhaps study guides. He asked if the R.D.S. of G.B. could form such a committee. Miss Robins (Great Britain) welcomed this idea, and stressed her hopes that the organizers of any future conference would have the guidance of such a committee, together with lively support from the different countries. But she pointed out the need for finance to enable even a small committee to meet.

Offers of Immediate Assistance

Mr. Lou Hoefnagels (Holland) made an offer of the free services of his office in Amsterdam "Work Centrum voor Leketoneel en Creatif Spel" (Work Centre for Non-Professional Drama and Creative Play) for a period of one year, and to be continued if the interest should warrant it. He could issue a news-letter at intervals in three languages, containing information received from countries, short articles and plays.

Herr Horst Behrend made a similar offer from his office of the Vaganten-Bühne, Berlin. He would deal with professional theatre.

Dr. Hartman then offered his office in Sigtuna, Sweden, to deal with all questions of liturgical drama.

These three offers were warmly applauded and accepted, not only because of their generosity in providing free service including postage, but also because one at least (Amsterdam) would be able to deal with plays in several languages and with translations. Yet Mr. Brian Barnes and Mr. Donald Mackay (both of Australia) asked that the R.D.S. should continue as the central co-ordinating body, and this was agreed upon. Every delegate not already a member undertook to join the Society immediately to enable it so to act.

Resolutions

The following resolutions were then proposed and carried unanimously:

1. That this Conference accepts with much gratitude the offers from Holland, Sweden and Berlin of secretarial exchange services for an initial period of one year, to be continued if interest warrants it.

2. That the delegates invited to this International Conference on Modern Christian Drama are convinced that future meetings at intervals of not less than five years would be of great creative value: that they intend to prepare, by the exchange of material, by local organisation and by study, for such meetings: and that they accordingly ask Foundations sympathetic to their aims favourably to consider assisting the organisation of such Conferences.

WEST RIDING COUNTY COUNCIL BRETTON HALL

TRAINING COLLEGE FOR TEACHERS

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THE CHURCH, THE THEATRE, AND THE WORLD

TOM DRIVER

(A lecture given at Royaumont)

Whatever we say about the church and the theatre must be understood as a part of what we say about the church and the world. We who are interested in so-called "religious drama" are a minority within the Church, summoned by our natures and our experiences to a particular form of service that is, we trust, right for us and, because it is right, paramount in our concern. Still, it is only one of the many callings that make up the totality of the Church.

By the same token, the theatre is only one rather small part of the world's culture. Therefore I repeat that whatever we say about the Church and the theatre is only a part of what we say about the Church and the world.

Whenever the Church begins to take its worldly responsibilities seriously with regard to any particular human endeavours, it finds itself occupying one corner of a triangle. We often use the formula, "Church and world" or as it is sometimes called, "Christ and culture", but this is slightly misleading, for it suggests a polarity with only two foci—the Church on the one hand and the world or culture on the other. Actually, where our interests become specific and we start relating our faith to particular human needs and problems, we find that the Church is actually standing over against two things rather than one. Out there, beyond the Church, if I may speak in that way for the moment, there is not only the "world", but also the particular cultural discipline to which our attention is being drawn.

The Christian theologian, for instance, faces not simply "the world" but he also, and particularly, faces the cultural discipline known as philosophy. His question cannot be simply that of making his theological statements relevant to "the world", but he must make them comprehensible and relevant to the philosophical scene in his own time, which of course includes the philosophical tradition. He cannot afford to ignore the philosophical work of his contemporaries, for by virtue of the fact that he is a theologian he is committed to philosophical thinking. Neither can he afford to shut himself up entirely in the academic world of philosophy and theology and ignore the world historical situation of the time in which he writes. The theologian of to-day cannot write exactly as he would have done in 1840, not only because that would mean leaving Ritschl and Kierkegaard and Barth out of account but also because it would mean ignoring Darwin and Einstein and Marx and Freud; and Dachau and Hiroshima and Budapest.

Furthermore, the theologian is interested not only in the impact that philosophy and history both have upon his theology, but he is also, or should be, interested in the relationship that exists between contemporary philosophy and contemporary world-historical situation. He has a right to call contemporary philosophy to the bar of judgment if he perceives that it is not taking as much account as it ought to of the life-situations in which men are actually standing. Or, conversely, he has a duty to speak up if he perceives that

philosophy itself is helping men to understand their situation in life better than contemporary theology is doing. Both of these kinds of judgments have recently been made in theology. Linguistic-analysis philosophy had been judged by some theologians to be an inadequate philosophy because it concentrates so hard upon the implied logic of language that it avoids the problems that arise in actual life-situations and are met by faith and ethics. And on the other hand, recent existentialist philosophy has served to criticise not only analytic philosophy but also those theologies that have paid too little attention to the moments of radically free decision that arise in the course of a man's existence.

This pattern of three-way relationships I am describing suggests the triangular diagram already mentioned. For the sake of clarity at one corner let us put the term "Christian faith". At another corner let us put the word "history". Here I intend "history" to stand for the actual set of circumstances, partly man-made, partly the result of the past, and partly dictated by nature, in which men find themselves at any given moment and at any given place. And at the other corner let us put the words "cultural Discipline", which will stand for any of the particular cultural or intellectual traditions that man has developed as a result of his labours toward civilization.

Now the relationships that hold on all three sides of this triangle are dialectical: that is, they work in two directions. The cultural disciplines are the product of history but also men know their historical situation by means of the cultural disciplines they elaborate. History is judged by religious faith, but also religious faith may be corrected and deepened by history. Faith judges and helps to form the cultural disciplines, but also faith is sharpened and made specifically meaningful as it works within the various cultural disciplines.

The relationship of the church and the world, is therefore very complex. *I desire it to be understood that whatever we say about religion and drama must be influenced by awareness of this complexity.* Specifically, such awareness may do for us two things: it may protect us from a common mistake about the Christian "use" of drama and it may remind us of the paramount goal of all our work in religious drama.

I

The common mistake about the Christian "use" of drama is that it is as I often hear it, a means of "communicating the Christian message". Whenever I hear this expression, I recall the advice known to Broadway playwrights: "If you have a message, give it to Western Union."

The mistake arises from an insufficient analysis of the nature of dramatic literature, the nature of man's historical existence, and the nature of the Christian faith itself.

1. It is quite true that the theatre has always dealt with ideas. Take the ideational content away from Aeschylus, Sophocles, the medieval plays, Shakespeare, Racine, or Ibsen and you have performed a pre-frontal lobotomy. Yet at the same time, try to pin-point with unambiguous clarity the "message" of any play by these masters, and you have on your hands an unending task. The very existence of the vast body of critical literature

surrounding these plays is evidence that they do not readily yield their "message", if indeed they have one. I rather suspect that they have many "messages", and that these are not all, even in the same play, entirely compatible. The critic who comes to the play brings many assumptions and opinions with him, no matter how objective he may try to be, with the result that criticism actually is a dialogue going on between the critic and the work and among the various critics. It is part of the very value that the Greek tragedians have for us that they may occasion criticism so vastly different as that of H. D. F. Kitto is from George Thomson. It is part of the worth of *Hamlet* that new books or articles are written on it at about the rate of one a week. This is part of its vitality, and it is one guarantee that the public will return to the work again and again, never exhausting its imaginative resources. But it could not happen if the work were clear in its message. If we say that a play communicates a message, we liken it to an ear of corn composed of kernel and husk. Once the kernel of the message is identified, the husk is disposable. There are, of course, innumerable plays that rather clearly proclaim an identifiable message, but they get thrown on to the husk-pile very soon; and there develops about them no lasting body of criticism. The religious drama movement can if it desires, turn its attention primarily to that sort of play, and I suppose that with sufficient craftsmanship a certain amount of effect could be obtained. But if that is our objective it betrays the fact that we are no longer genuinely interested in the cultural discipline of drama. We then begin to make use of the drama for our own purposes; we turn it into a tool, and this in turn betrays our lack of understanding of the Christian gospel itself.

2. The Christian gospel cannot be understood properly if it is taken as a point of view competing in society with other points of view and requiring the service of all the various means of propaganda. Persons who are active in the communications field within the Church latch on very quickly to those words that end the Gospel of Matthew: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The immensity of the task of preaching to every creature in this age when there are so many creatures and so many different nations overwhelm one, and it is perhaps natural that Christians should attempt to make use of any and all means of mass communication one of which appears to be the drama.

It seems to me, however, that in so doing many persons lose sight of the important word in the text cited, namely the word "gospel". Surely it will be granted that the means of preaching and the nature of the gospel ought to be compatible. What, then, is characteristic of the gospel? The gospel we are told is something that releases the captives, binds up the broken, and brings good news to the poor. In other words, it is something that redeems. It is something that brings both wholeness and freedom.

Now, I take it that these benefits cannot be brought to men as individuals if they are not also brought to human culture. It is precisely the error of the mass evangelists in the American tradition of Billy Sunday and Billy Graham that they preach a so-called gospel that cares little or nothing for the cultural, social, and political forms in which men actually live. For them salvation is an individual matter, with a vague hope tacked on it that if you change individuals you will somehow change society. But where does the individual

stop and society begin? Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as the individual, because there is no such thing as a man who is not both the shaper of and the product shaped by society. One does not redeem a diseased tree by attending only to the tree, but by clearing the undergrowth around it and by treating the soil in which its roots go down and from which it draws its nourishment. A healthy tree is good for the soil and for certain other plants that grow around it, but the tree and its environment and soil must be cultivated together. The Christian gospel of redemption is like that.

This means that we care as Christians not only for individual men but also for their cultural disciplines; for government, for social institutions, for economic policies, for the nature of community life and, in our particular case, for that cultural discipline which is called drama or theatre. Therefore our models and our objects of supreme attention are those works that represent the best, not the second-best. A man may go out and write propagandistic melodrama if he wants to. He may construct the didactic bit of pseudo-liturgy that stops to preach at every pause in the action. He may use the gimmicks of show business as TV salesmen use them in order to promote a product. But in so doing he will be entirely a parasite upon the theatrical world, and he will contribute nothing to the development of the art of the drama. He will do nothing in the work of Christ's redemption of the cultural discipline, and in the long run he will pervert the Christian gospel. Let it be put down as a standard: our primary interest is not what we may *say through* drama, but what we may *do for* drama. We are, by grace, participants in God's work of redemption through Christ. We are not little parts of God's cosmic public-address system.

3. The propagandistic mistake is also occasioned by a misunderstanding of man's present historical situation. Because of the developments brought about by the industrial revolution and its child the technological revolution, men to-day are everywhere being turned into functional atoms in the gigantic machine of society. I am thinking of the functionary worker on the industrial assembly line as well as the citizen in the Communist states who serves only the interests of the ruling social planners, and every more I am thinking of the vast public who are viewed by the propagandizers of Washington, Moscow, Madison Avenue, and elsewhere as objects of psychological manipulation. There can hardly have been a time in history when men were so systematically dehumanized by those who wish to improve them. They are dehumanized by forces that act to rob them of freedom, the freedom that comes from having to make one's own response to a life-situation that is never entirely clear. Drama, television, or reading matter that comes to them as propaganda for a new and better point of view only strengthens these deadly forces, and drives man toward false solutions of their dilemma.

The reason I am primarily interested in the arts is that where the arts are willing to be artistic rather than promotional they work in an opposite way from the means of mass communication. They do this precisely because they are ambiguous—precisely because they do not urge one particular reaction. A genuine work of art confronts a man with something he does not have a ready-made guide for interpreting. It appeals to the complexity that is characteristic of genuine, as opposed to abstract, existence. And it calls the viewer to participate in the organic unity of life instead of the exclusively

rational and utopian unity that the modern planners of society vainly dream for. You see this the minute you observe that so-called "modern" art, which is the authentic art of our age, has been attacked by all the social absolutists, who include not only the Communist dictators and the Fascist dictators, but also the bourgeoisie in the capitalist world. Plato, bless his heart, was also suspicious of art—not because he didn't like it but because he knew that it was disruptive of social unity. Now I am not against social unity. I am against it only when it is dictated, whether by Marxists, bourgeois conventionalists, or by Plato himself. To-day I am especially suspicious of social unity because I see that the greatest threat now confronting us is not chaos but rather the withering away of the desire to exercise personal freedom—the shift, as David Riesman calls it, from the inner-directed man to the outer-directed man. This is the historical situation that should make us Christian dramatists even more firmly dedicated to the encouragement of genuine art and the discouragement of all forms of propaganda, even Christian propaganda.

What, then, is the function of Christian drama? If it is not to deliver a message, what is it? Its function is the stimulation of the imagination. Denis de Rougemont has said that art is an oriented trap for meditation. What we ask of the Christian play is that it arrest the attention of the viewer, that it lead him into an area of thought, emotion, or other experience that is broadening for him and has some relevance to the realities that underlie the Christian faith. We do not ask that the play convert the viewer, that it explain the mysteries of the faith, or that it prove to him the validity of the doctrines. We ask only that the play provide the occasion for the viewer's entertaining in his mind and his feelings, ways of looking at life that are Christian.

We must not forget that the viewpoints of art are always hypothetical. Art, if you please, is the domain of infinite possibility, a realm where anything *can* be true because anything *might* be true. But the viewpoints of faith are not hypothetical. Faith is the domain of finite commitment. It exists in a realm where some things *cannot* be true because other things *are* true.

If you grasp this point you see why the Church has often been suspicious of art, but you also see why it cannot do without it. The Church is suspicious of art's lack of ultimate commitment. (I speak here of *art*, not necessarily, of the *artist*, who may or may not be a man of commitment in faith). The Church is suspicious of art's endless elaboration of new possibilities, new worlds, new kinds of truth, for this sort of thing leads to heresy as easily as it leads to orthodoxy. When the Church condemned Galileo, it was his *imagination* that she condemned, for in scientific geniuses of Galileo's sort the artist and the scientist meet in the task of dreaming about what may be so regardless of what is implied about what men think *is* so.

Yet now we see why the Church turns to art in her apologetic task. For when she comes into contact with the received opinions of the natural man, the Church herself is heterodox. The assumptions contained in the Biblical revelation stand the common assumptions of man on their heads. The natural man rejects the Biblical witness because he knows, or thinks he knows, that it cannot be true. It contradicts his scientific world view, it contradicts his cosmopolitan tolerance of all religions by its exclusivistic claims, and it

contradicts his good opinion of himself. The Church can get nowhere with such a mentality unless it can get it first of all to enter into the way of looking at things that is characteristic of the Biblical witness. And this entering into such a view is necessarily the work of the imagination. That is why I say that the Christian dramatist's job is to stimulate the imagination. Yet what art cannot do is to compel the viewer to go beyond the imaginative entertainment of the revelation to an existential commitment to do it. This passing over the line between imagination and commitment is something only the Holy Spirit may accomplish, and so what I am really saying through all of this is that we should refrain in our dramatic work from playing God. To play God is that temptation of all artists. Remember that art was in its beginnings an off-shoot of ritual magic, and just in the degree that we as Christians reject the pagan in art we also reject the temptation to make art itself perform the functions that God reserves to Himself acting through His Spirit.

Now that I mention the Spirit I must also end this section of my remarks by pointing to the fact that art is as necessary to the committed Christian as it is in the apologetic task of gaining the imaginative attention of the non-Christian. When we pass over the line that separates imagination from commitment, we do not leave the imaginative forever behind. You will have observed that my thinking here is similar to Kierkegaard's distinction between the aesthetic stage of existence and the ethical. For Kierkegaard, commitment is characteristic of the ethical stage. But when he comes to the third stage in his scheme, the religious, Kierkegaard maintains that the aesthetic returns. It returns because the Christian revelation does not give absolute knowledge and absolute certainty. Absolute knowledge and absolute certainty would kill human freedom. In the religious life there is given a great freedom of play for the mind; and the imaginative life, now mastered and corrected in its work, flowers in an exhilarated way unknown to it before. The philosophical way of putting this is to say that the religious mind thinks in terms of symbols and that between the symbol and the reality it symbolises there is always a gap. If this gap is bridged by faith, that does not mean the gap ceases to be. And the imaginative life of faith is exercised precisely in the continual reconstruction of the symbolic bridge that leads from the finite to the infinite and from the infinite to the finite. A look at the glory and the variety of Christian art will demonstrate what I am talking about. It is not too much to say that within the religious life art comes into its own and performs its most sublime function of all: the celebration of the mysteries that reside in the Godhead and in Creation.

II

Let us now return to that triangular diagram I mentioned previously, the one in which the Christian faith was seen to be in vital relationship to the cultural discipline of drama on the one hand and to the historical situation of man on the other. I have so far been speaking mainly about the relation of the faith to the cultural discipline. I am not going to speak about all three sides of the triangle but I do want to say something about the second side, namely the relationship between the cultural discipline and the historical situation: that is, between the theatre and the world.

I said before that our main concern as workers in religious drama ought to be in what we as Christians can do for the art of drama, more than in discovering what the drama can do for us. That is because we exist as agents of God's redemptive work in Christ, branches of God's life-giving vine. That is our calling. Now, suppose we ask what it is that the art of drama most needs in our day and time.

We are not living, I think all would agree, in a great age of theatre. It is not the worst the world has ever known, but it is far from being the best. The really excellent literary forms of our day are poetry and the short story. I have recently been making an anthology of twentieth-century poetry, and my reading for this collection convinced me that it would be hard to find an age in Western history in which better poetry was written. Why is it that the shorter literary forms—the poem and the story—are now flourishing while the drama and the novel are in a state of comparative mediocrity? It seems to me the reason is that the poem and the short story are forms ideally suited for the expression of a personal point of view, whereas the drama by nature demands the expression of a public point of view. And if the art of play-writing languishes to-day, surely the reason is that the theatre has by and large cut itself off from the world situation in which we find ourselves. It fails to express the public concerns that confront men in the twentieth century. I do not mean that we do not have plays addressing particular social problems. We have a number written about the racial questions, the atomic problem, the Communist menace, and so on. But these, because they usually turn out to be thesis plays of one kind or another, usually leave us especially frustrated. They rather clearly urge a certain opinion, and they fall into the class of propaganda plays that I was excoriating earlier in connection with Christian drama. Around the turn of the century in Europe and in the thirties in America the *pièce à thèse* had some validity as a revitalising force in the theatre. But to-day we have not only grown weary of that form, we also live in a time when the advocacy of social programmes no longer meets our most fundamental need. The basic problem confronting us to-day is not that of taking up “arms against a sea of troubles” but that of finding a pattern in nature and history that will supply meaning to an existence that is daily becoming more and more meaningless.

I agree with Paul Tillich that the characteristic anxiety of our time arises from the threat of meaninglessness. The new phase in the Cold War shows us this with great clarity. The area of genuine competition between Communism and the free world is now shifting from the armaments race to the economic race. Russia is out to show the world that Communism can deliver a material standard of living that is in every way the equal of that produced by the sort of mixed capitalism we have in the West. The question is becoming that of who can produce more cars, more refrigerators, more high-fidelity equipment and the rest. This undoubtedly relieves us somewhat from the horrors of the atomic threat, but does it not plunge us into what is at last an even more terrible position—the acknowledgment that material productivity is the standard by which a civilization is to be judged? And it leaves entirely out of account the genuine question, which is what we shall do with our cars, refrigerators, and high-fidelity sets. In other words, what is the basic human goal of our productivity? This is a question entirely

ignored in the writings of Marx and Lenin. And the danger is that, in meeting the threat posed by the work of those men, we in the West shall come to ignore the question also. To-day we and the Russians both inhabit an island of productivity surrounded by a sea of nothingness. Such perhaps is the ironic triumph of human ingenuity.

Now it is this dimension of the human problem that our dramatists must begin to face and face seriously if they are to speak again of the public concerns proper to their art. The best of our playwrights are already feeling their way toward it. It haunts the work of Tennessee Williams, Eugene Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett. Beckett has perhaps captured our sense of ourselves better than any other dramatist, but it is noteworthy that he has done it by the means of eliminating that quality that has throughout our tradition been central to the drama—namely the quality of action.

Here is where I think the Christian faith has much to say and do on behalf of the art of drama. It is up to us to establish every sort of contact we can with the dramatists of our day, both those who are already known and those who are now in training for the work they will produce later. We must get into the field of criticism. We must publish the kind of literature that will be read by the serious dramatist. We must patronise the needy writers. We must do what we are trying to do at Union Theological Seminary—establish residencies for young playwrights who will converse with us about the problems common to them and to us. We must cultivate audiences for the kind of theatre that is not mere diversion. And we must do all this to the end of helping the playwrights to entertain that possibility that is the faith and the hope of the Christian Church, namely that in this apparently chaotic age when the universe is being re-defined almost daily by science, and the morals that used to govern men's relations are breaking down, and the future is entirely a question-mark—in precisely this world and at this time, God is exercising His providential sovereignty over the courses of history.

To ask that we speak to the playwrights about these things is to impose at the same time a severe task upon contemporary theology. It is not as if we theologians already had all the answers and now had only to get them across to others. Our own faith must come into the most vital kind of relationship with our present historical situation at the same time as we carry on our dialogue with the playwrights. I think we have already taken the first decisive step in our re-emphasis to-day upon Biblical eschatology, which is to say upon God's transcendence of history and His guidance of it toward His own *telos*. We will take the second step when we begin in Protestantism to emphasise once again the doctrine of Creation, for we dare not talk much about what God *will do* if we do not talk also about what he *has given us*. And I do not want you to forget when I use so easily here the term "God" that I am vividly aware of how useless that term has become in most discourse to-day. Nor do I think that is entirely bad. For what we must acknowledge with all eagerness is that God is not necessarily represented accurately by any of the names we use for Him or that He has given to us in the past. The traditional God of Theism we may abandon. We may not abandon the "God beyond God". And also we may not abandon the revelation of that unseeable one in Christ. We may, I think, give up the name God sooner than we give up the name Christ. And we must be radically bold in asserting

that Christ is the centre of all that is, including whatever lies beyond the moon and is, no doubt, eventually to be discovered by the explorations in outer space which man is now beginning. In other words, though the future is unknown to us (and is in God's hands anyway), and though the geography of the universe is entirely in doubt, the *centre* of human knowledge and history is not unknown. That centre is Christ. Not perhaps the pious Christ of domesticated religion, but certainly the eternal Logos who became flesh and partook of man's bitterest cup, who drank the dregs of death.

Perhaps you are saying this is all very well but that it is not sufficiently pertinent to the art of drama. I say it is. For I think that the Christians are the only persons to-day who are not only thinking about the basic question of the meaning of human existence but are also stewards of a truth that makes possible an image of our existence. The existentialists of the secular variety are thinking about the question and we have much to learn from the dramatic work of Sartre, Camus, and Beckett. But existentialism *per se* cannot do justice to human history. It emphasizes the present moment of decision so radically that it obliterates one's sense of identity with any past and one's obligations and hopes for the future. Existentialism, left to its own devices, destroys history. Therefore, though I commend its earnestness and its profundity with regard to the spirit of man, I believe that in the long run it compounds our problem. It takes us further and further from the answer to our basic question of the moment: what is the pattern of our history according to which we may know the meaning of the decisions we must make to-day? Christianity binds the past, the future, and the present into a unity without destroying the reality of time past and time future. And it is precisely its ability to do this that makes it pertinent to the artists of to-day who are searching so desperately for the images that would define our present existence for us.

We therefore have this treasure. We must be willing to commit it to the earthen vessels of dramatic expression. We must do it because it can be of service to the art of drama in its task of setting forth viable images of our world historical situation and of the hope that is possible for the man of our time.

Lest you suppose that I have prepared a task much too immense, I conclude with the words of counsel from one it has been my privilege to call a colleague. Reinhold Niebuhr: "Nothing we do that is worth doing can be accomplished in our lifetime; therefore we are saved by hope".

AFTER-THOUGHTS ON "THE STRONG ARE LONELY"

D. R. W. CARR

At the Edinburgh Festival in 1956, I saw a performance of the play *The Strong are Lonely* by Fritz Hochwälder, acted with clarity, strength and imagination by a strong cast led by Donald Wolfit as the Father Provincial of a Jesuit order in South America about 1760.

This play not only made a memorable dramatic impact on me then but has also since raised a number of searching questions on our contemporary situation.

The play dealt with the problem of obedience—the grim conflict in the heart of the Father Provincial when he was asked to choose between the vow of unquestioning obedience to the commands of his superior in the Jesuit order, and his strong desire to carry on his valuable social work for the backward Indians who had become recent converts. He decided to keep his vow, there was sharp division of opinion among his own priests, the Indians lost their rights and he himself was killed in the bloodshed that ensued. He had previously been disillusioned himself when the Indian converts appeared to value Christianity chiefly for the material benefits and security it conferred.

The problem is one that concerns us all. “To whom shall we pay tribute? To God or Caesar?” In war do we obey the State or the dictates of our own consciences? Do we value the things of God more than material benefits? Can we be truly Christian and not be deeply concerned about social justice for all men? In the Christian family can there be distinctions of race and colour and worldly goods that separate us into superior and inferior?

In a question of obedience Christians are to obey God, rather than men. How do we know the will of God? Through prayer and meditation, through study of our Lord’s example, through simple trust that our Father will reveal our true motives, show us His will and give us the love, strength and courage to take the right way.

The Father Provincial should have committed the problem to God, gathered his Jesuits and Indians together and explained the situation; then in prayer and silence waited for His will to be made known. The secrecy enjoined by the Jesuit Director was wrong. It set obedience to a regulation above obedience to God. There is no rule or law that can deal justly with all circumstances at all times.

“The sabbath was made for man—not man for the Sabbath.” The true way is to be found only by continually resorting to the example of Jesus. He was Love incarnate. He came to supersede the existing Law which had served a very useful purpose. He did not trim his sails or do just what was expedient or judge success by worldly standards. He committed all to his Father in heaven and lived in absolute obedience to his Will.

St Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuit order, laid so much stress on obedience because he had formerly been a soldier. He naturally thought in military terms and so the vow of obedience to the superior officer was of the first importance in maintaining sound discipline. For the Christian, however, the Leader must be God himself and the Church is only the channel of God when above all else it is the expression of Love and Justice.

The Indians should have been regarded by the Jesuit Director as the children of our Heavenly Father and as brethren of the Jesuits. Instead his pride in his race and nation, his stress on the power of the Church blinded him to his true motives. He obviously disliked the friendship between the Father Provincial and the Protestant Dutch tea merchant. His narrow bigotry and absence of love for his fellow men made him consider a doctrinaire position impregnable.

The Indians should have been led gradually to the spiritual through the natural. All men on earth need to grow gradually in spiritual experience and first need their basic material needs satisfied. It was necessary for God himself to take our human shape with all its limitations before men could apprehend what God was like. Children have to be taught by concrete methods, by the use of their five senses, by material perception. And we are all spiritual children. "Now we see through a glass darkly." The way, as St Paul himself found was an identification of ourselves with others, not in a dull uniformity but as members of one family in Christ, in love, in the full development of selfless imagination, so that we seek another's good as we seek our own.

Must we always reject the positive way for the negative, the way of Love for the way of Force?

How challenging it would be if Fritz Hochwälder wrote another play where God's way was sought and taken despite the immediate worldly consequences. And need this way necessarily spell failure and persecution?

William Penn, in the Settlement of Pennsylvania found "A more excellent way" with his Indians, but then the Quakers have always realised the importance of each individual's Inner Light and the reality of group guidance in the period of silence.

In the Roman Catholic Church too, there have been great Christians who not only saw no conflict between their beliefs and their concern for social progress, but who considered that love of our fellowmen was indispensably bound up with love of God and of His Church.

RELIGIOUS DRAMA IN ZULULAND

DOREEN PLAYNE

I remember watching Guy Vaesen produce *A Dove out of Darkness* that my group had written at the York School of Religious Drama in 1951. Some of the actors expected him to tell them what to do and how to speak; but always they were led to answer their own questions by identifying themselves more closely with their parts. I thought, "In Zululand one simply has to show them what and how." Since then greater experience has made me realise that, whereas I had begun by expecting the African actor to go beyond the limits of his own experience, far greater opportunities lay ahead if one drew out and used his natural wealth of feelings, observation and ability. Soon some of the Zulus and I, working together in this way began to learn much more about each other and about Christian Drama.

Observing many unaided efforts, one is impressed with the ability of any group of Africans to put on a play at a day's notice. The theme will almost certainly combine love, laughter, drunkenness, fighting and mimicry. Rarely is anyone self-conscious or at a loss for song or words. That many speak together at the same time, adds to the fun and is found confusing only by the foreigner. This has shown me the value of chorus work, in order to regulate and control the talking together, which with a little encouragement becomes more and more rhythmic, and easily bursts into spontaneous song. One

appreciates the varied use to which limited possessions are put on the stage, and the distinctive hats that appear from nowhere. One learns what is and what is not a reasonable request. I remember once asking an African to make a crocodile. Without batting an eyelid, he asked for some sacking and returned next day with a most realistic scaly reptile. On the adverse side, in nearly every play, time is obviously filled in while waiting for someone to enter, and time being such a weakness, one learns to safeguard the moment of every entrance. Actors enjoy the play so much themselves, that they are apt to forget all about the audience, turning their backs and speaking only to each other, and this too the would-be producer notes.

To learn parts of a play and to reproduce faithfully what has been memorised, is foreign to the African actor, and limits him, as then so much of his attention is concentrated on recalling his words that little is left for spontaneous acting. If, however, the gift of improvising is not controlled, any individual may run away with the play, and the greater the knowledge of the vernacular, the more horrified one can be at the results. The best way seems to be to explain carefully what needs to be portrayed, e.g., jealousy, and to give a set-up with as much scope as possible, e.g., a polygamist with his wives; then to give one sentence that must be said, e.g., "He loves you more than he loves me. I hate you," then to allow verbal addition and free play only in so far as they help to display the jealousy.

The rhythm that beats so powerfully in Africa is a great asset to drama. In one play, the actors decided how the cannibal would hop with big strides: 1 . . . 1 . . . 1 . . .; how the chief would walk sedately: 1 . 2 . 1 . 2 . 1 . 2 . and how the chief's daughter would trip along: 1234 1234 1234. A boy with a drum kept the rhythm going, emphasising the beat when the steps of all three coincided. Everything said, sung or acted, was done in the appropriate rhythm by these three players and their dependents, and there was a hilarious chase at the end when the chief with his 1 . 2 . 1 . 2 . 1 . 2 . overtook the cannibal's 1 . . . 1 . . . 1 . . . opened the heavy suitcase that had delayed the man-eater, and released his own long lost daughter who sobbed out her thankfulness with a 1234 1234 1234, and once again right triumphed over wrong. The same idea has been successfully applied to a Nativity Play with angels, shepherds and wise men, each group moving and speaking in different rhythms.

Here it is necessary to be both playwright and producer, and one is always on the look-out for a suitable theme. Zululand no less than any others ask why the righteous suffer, so the idea of a modern Zulu Job was conceived. A rich man had to be portrayed, and I sat by the bedside of many Zulu patients to gain their opinion of the distinctive marks of a modern rich Zulu and the kind of friends he would have, and what bad luck for him would mean. A paraffin maize grinder as opposed to the grinding stone, a lorry, many cattle and extensive maize fields were suggested to show wealth, and the characters of a chief, a witch-doctor and a storekeeper emerged as his friends. Job, being afflicted with leprosy was assisted into this hospital ambulance, our name being covered with that of Zululand's Leper Institution, and the vehicle carried Job out of one entrance and was not seen depositing Job at another. Our Devil was assisted by seven attractive little black imps. My direction in the script included "a most devilish dance" but this raised great

difficulty. Satan was asked to try to invent a horrible dance for his satellites, but another who came with me to see the result pronounced it to be very nice. "I don't want something nice, but something nasty," I replied hopelessly. All who tried utterly failed to produce anything judged by the others to be horrible, and I was at my wits end until I remembered how newcomers at boarding schools are ragged on their first night, and sometimes quite cruelly treated. Nurses were asked, "Tell me what happened to you on your first night at school". All the horrors described: the calling of insulting names, the tweaking of noses, the forced drill, the beatings, the tossing in blankets, etc., were combined to make a dance that could unanimously be described as "devilish". After this, Satan having failed to make Job stop worshipping God and wanting to be alone to think up some really super evil, chased his little imps back to Hell, lighting Chinese crackers behind them, which expedited their exeunt and also temporarily dispersed half the audience. At the end of the play, the Cross was seen to be the heart of all suffering. God was shown to know and care about our troubles and Job was brought nearer to Him by all he had endured. Satan's failure and God's triumph were reminiscent of the medieval morality plays.

Still greater problems were involved last year in trying to make and produce a pageant for 115 almost illiterate and mostly non-Christian cane cutters. The golden rule, "proceed from the known to the unknown" guided me to begin with sugar cane and a drum. The play opened to show some half-grown sugar cane representing the Old Testament and the local sectarian beliefs. Nearby, another clump this time of full-grown cane, symbolised Christianity, and the second was shown in both senses to be the fulfilment of the first. Later the hoeing of the weeds from the sugar cane on one side of the stage, was compared with the Church's fight against the weeds of sin. This was followed by a truck on one side being loaded with cane and being pushed off-stage to the sugar refinery, returning with the raw material transformed into sugar, molasses and treacle. Meanwhile on the other side, a second truck was loaded with sinners, and pushed mid-stage to God's refinery, the Cross, returning with the sinners transformed into saints. So an audience of some hundreds, mostly unbelievers, witnessed the redeeming power of our Risen Lord.

It is very easy to make the mistake of thinking that what is obvious to us, is equally so to others. One cannot too often test the African reaction to words, pictures, etc. Some of the African parables have been acted here in Zulu idiom by groups of educated people, and the coloured slides projected to help to teach their more backward brethren. How could the "mighty famine" in the Prodigal Son be photographed? Someone suggested by a field of poor corn. Another as a check was asked, "If you saw a picture of a field of poor corn, what would you suggest as the explanation?" One said, "No fertiliser has been used." Another said, "There is no fence, and the cattle have broken in and spoilt the crops." Many other ideas as to how to photograph famine were rejected before one found unanimous acceptance: a queue of people outside a trading store. People only queue when maize is in short supply, and the reason for the limited sales is obviously drought and famine. "What do you see in this picture?" should be asked frequently by anyone trying to understand the Zulus, and after many years in this country,

CHRISTIAN DRAMA

I still have frequent surprises at their answers. Laughter often comes unexpectedly especially to those ignorant of native custom. In the parable of the Lost Coin, which here becomes the lost wedding ring, my photographs include a young bride, displaying her wedding ring whilst grinding. You might be puzzled at the roars of laughter it produces, unless you know that every bride, however well-educated or rich, is expected to use the old-fashioned grinding stone when she arrives at the kraal of her mother-in-law, just to show that she is not proud. This bride was well-to-do, clearly the type accustomed to a grinding machine, hence the mirth.

Long Church services, a Victorian piosity, antiquated teaching methods, and doleful Anglican chants combine all too often to make religion a dull matter. To off-set this, we have turned the Christmas shepherds into rollicking little African herd boys, fighting with sticks, playing with stones, and catching and roasting birds. We have forgotten about the angels drawn a hundred years ago by artists of other times and lands, and instead the dearest little Zulu girls of six or seven, have been encouraged to jive their Heavenly joy. We dressed them in minute muslin skirts decorated and weighted down with bead work. We strapped little bunchy wings on their backs, leaving bare their beautiful brown chests; and skirts, wings and beads were of every colour of the rainbow. We have forgotten the nun-like notion of the Blessed Virgin Mary, trying instead to discover the Zulu conception of beauty and innocency. We have tried to help the African actors to enjoy their religion by using their gifts of laughter and music and mimicry to the honour and glory of God; and what fun it has been for us all!



*THE WAY OF THE CROSS AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF GHANA
JESUS RECEIVES THE CROSS*

STUDENTS AT STRASBOURG

FRANCES GLENDENNING

While the International Conference was taking place at Royaumont in July, 750 students and young church leaders from seventy-five countries were meeting in Strasbourg to continue their study, prayer and discussion on the great theme "The Life and Mission of the Church". The World Student Christian Federation began to lay plans for this project four years ago and further regional conferences are already planned up to 1965.

What plays would you choose to present to an audience coming from Burma to Brazil, from New York to Tokyo, from Roman Catholic to Plymouth Brethren? From one point of view it was an audience divided by every known human barrier. From another it was a body of people united in a desperate concern to serve the church of God in this twentieth-century world.

On the first night of the conference there was a performance of *Huis Clos* (*In Camera, Vicious Circle, No Exit*) by Jean-Paul Sartre. The play was rehearsed in London at Student Movement House by a group of students, produced by the Revd. Frank Glendenning, Warden of the House and a member of the staff of the World Student Christian Federation.

On the last night, the same group *in the same place*—the foyer of the new Engineering Faculty—performed *The Way of the Cross* by Henri Ghéon. In between the two productions there were thirty-two lectures as well as seminars and tutorials all concerned with various aspects of the life and mission of the church.

Why were these plays chosen and what was their effect? Many Christian groups are compelled to choose a particular play, not because it is ideal but because there is nothing better. Strasbourg was no exception. Where is there a play which will powerfully show Christians what they are up against in serving God in His world? The choice eventually fell upon Jean-Paul Sartre, the French atheist and existentialist whose depiction of hell in *Huis Clos* is more profound than anything written by his Christian contemporaries, artists and theologians.

The three characters, a man and two women, react in their different ways to their discovery that they are in hell. The absence of torture and pain puzzles them until they realise that they are each others' torturers. The play swings in a series of "vicious circles" as they try to extricate themselves from an intolerable situation by a frank confession of their past (how difficult this proves!) by an attempt at love and mutual help, "It's no use. I'm all dried up. I can't give and I can't receive"; by an attempt to kill each other, "You crazy creature, what do you think you're doing? You know quite well I'm dead."

The play ends with the grim realisation that there is no way out of this vicious circle, this is a hell which goes on, "for ever and ever and ever". The Christian cannot help seeing this play not only as a terrifying picture of life without redemption but also as a revelation of the futility of life without judgment. For many at Strasbourg this production was the sharpest presentation of some characteristics of the contemporary scene. For some it was

difficult to feel any identification with the "vicious" characters on the stage. For others, from a pietist background, the production proved even offensive. But for all, it demonstrated the desperate need for an intervention to save man from himself.

Ghéon's *The Way of the Cross* is well-known not only in the West but also in parts of Asia and Africa. Many students at Strasbourg had already seen or taken part in this play. But played in modern dress on the naked acting area afforded by the foyer, and stripped of all sentimentality and "religiosity", this production of Ghéon's play did not fail to confound the wisdom of men with the foolishness of God and with the way that he chose to intervene in the affairs of men.

During the days at Strasbourg much was said about the life and mission of the church. The two plays offered to the conference a picture of God's acts of grace and of people for whom he acted. The church's mission is to introduce them to each other.

IMPRESSIONS OF A SUMMER TOUR

ELSPETH M. TOWNSHEND

Cast: 4m, 9f. Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic: English, Australian, New Zealand, American and Northumbrian. (Common factor—Religious Drama.)

In addition: Travel agents' representatives—various.

Costume: As for English climate, no swimming or sunbathing attire worn during this period.

Props: Assorted luggage (string bags, duffle bags and a wardrobe on wheels) inflatable cushions and phrase-books.

Sound effects: To accompaniment of train and cutlery noise, continuous background of conversation in diverse accents about plays written, dressed, produced, performed, heard about and seen.

Lighting: Bright when not wet: with light filter on camera photographs would have been excellent and available for reference.

Scenery: Magnificent.

PRELUDE: 5.45 a.m., Saturday, July 30th

Travel sickness pills taken by English Anglican before ever leaving home, paralysis of fear having set in at thoughts of joining an unknown number of unknown people to follow, what until a week previously had been, an unknown itinerary to include visits to four of the Religious Drama productions in Europe.

PROLOGUE: Scene, Liverpool Street Station, 7.30 a.m.

Spoken variously as characters with like luggage labels identify themselves. "Excuse me, are we bound for the same place?"

ACT I: Scene, Tegelen, Holland.

Passion Play *From Gabbatha to Golgotha*—three hours long, pouring rain, concrete seats, funeral pace, but alive in feeling for character (as Judas and his mother) and use of natural setting, formerly a monastery garden (as in journey to Calvary)—the whole performed by local people, a great potential which under professional direction could be more fully realised.

ACT II: Scene, Oberammergau

Reached in darkness after over thirteen hours' travelling—one-legged, bearded, taxi driver; party divided amongst several houses and hotels, so losing identity and becoming part of community—the stark simplicity of the early Service in the temporary Anglican Church, the decoration and white-scrubbed pews of the village church—the variety of religious garb worn by delegates to the Eucharistic Congress in Munich—and the play. The play of discipline, dignity and sincerity, held rigid within the grip of tradition, inflexible, terrifying in the unison of crowd speech, moving in its familiar yet unidentifiable music—not a subject for dramatic criticism, but rather a communal experience.

ACT III: Scene, Salzburg

Jedermann in the Dom Platz, professional and positive in welcome sunlight. Mozart, music and marionettes—adventures of indifferent accommodation and local food, cliff-top coffee—Anglican worship below Russian Orthodoxy—torrential rain and missed last buses.

ACT IV: Scene, Lucerne.

Lake and mountains, breakdown of bus en route for Einsiedeln, *The Great Theatre of the World*, performed before the Monastery Church, a magnificent setting, wider than a wide-screen, great possibilities, but not always used.

EPILOGUE: Scene, English Channel between Calais and Folkestone. Some time after noon, Friday August 12th. Spoken variously as characters: change colour: "How much longer will it take?"

ENVOI

Four days later two new students arrived at the R.D.S. Summer School, Culham, they were—a New Zealand Methodist and an English Anglican, who, up to two weeks before, had had no intention of enrolling for the Course!

SUMMER SCHOOL, 1960

JOHN HUNTER

The prophetess Deborah, so far as one knows, never sent out her directives on a post-card, but apart from this she must have been very like Pamela Keily. The drive and determination, which gave Barak the inspiration and support he needed to defeat the Canaanites, were this year harnessed to

organising the R.D.S. Summer School at Culham College, Abingdon. "Summer school," the *habitués* call it; just like that without a prefix, as though it were the only one in the world; and this is just part of the devotion, the united dedication to a cause that is just.

For nine days we ate, lived and slept Religious Drama. Rehearsal, meditation, lecture, prayer, discussion in groups, talk over meals, browsing in the book-room, chat over coffee—no let-up, unless you count tennis and country-dancing. And at the end of it all, six demonstration rehearsals. "I come each year," one lady told me, "and I always get something new". One could believe it. The pace is tremendous, but if you can stand up to it then you come away with your ideas assaulted but clear.

The core of the week, for me and for many, was when Professor Tom Driver gave his two-part lecture on *The Mission of the Church and the Mystery of Drama*. Professor Driver is from the Union Theological Seminary, New York, and what he had to say was a model of profound lucidity, a foundation for all that one might subsequently think and feel about the subject. "Communication," one of the things the week was about, had now become a dirty word, with overtones of unloving condescension, quite incompatible with the true art of drama. Preaching was for the pulpit, and drama should achieve the higher task of awareness shared in love. And so there was no such thing as Religious Drama—there was religion, and there was drama. It didn't matter that one disagreed with most of what Professor Driver said. "Intensely stimulating"—and the cliché was true.

To balance this, Father Simon Mein, of the Society of the Sacred Mission, talked about Drama in Worship. Father Simon was not concerned with drama as an art, but with how dramatic form had been used as the handmaid of worship. His scholarly exposition of the subject was fascinating enough, but the examples he showed seemed to me much more moving than any of the plays we saw the following day and far more charged with the grandeur of God.

Other who attended the course may not agree with me that these were the two most exciting occasions, and certainly there was a great deal besides. Canon Ernie Southcott and Martial Rose, jointly, blasted the proscenium arch and the rood-screen, to give us drama and worship truly in the round. The Revd. Vernon Sproxton, of B.B.C. television, deplored an age of Gaze and Gawp. Rosalinde Fuller gave a solo dramatic recital, and held her audience spell-bound. Christopher le Fleming introduced and annotated a gramophone recital of *The Play of Daniel*. Later Mr. le Fleming joined Anne Ridler in a recital of piano music and Miss Ridler's own poetry. The Rev. Andrew Bradley, Warden of Bagshot Park, spoke with frightening perception about Man, and God, and Communication, and a whole lot else. Oliver Wilkinson, drama adviser to the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council, gave a lecture-demonstration of methods of communication, and introduced us to some charming West Indians and some cardboard Scandinavians. There was a boat trip, and a theatre trip, and the food was quite excellent.

A lot of each day, of course, was spent in rehearsal, and only here will I carp. No doubt everyone enjoyed it all—"I certainly wouldn't have chosen to be in any other group"—but it is questionable whether some of the plays chosen justified the time spent upon them. There wasn't one, for instance,

that an ordinary parish group could have tackled, supposing that it had wanted to. At the end, I didn't know why we had done some of these plays—to watch a real producer at work? To learn to act? To start us discussing? To “share awareness”? No purpose made itself clear, and perhaps it is significant that the two most gripping pieces were partly in the nature of improvisations. But undoubtedly it was fun, and God too works in a mysterious way.

Several new features were in evidence this year. The students and lecturers, for instance, were much more international, and this greatly added to the interest of hearing other ideas and experiences. Students and staff, moreover, had been encouraged to bring their children with them, and this created a pleasant, family atmosphere unusual at a course. Then there was a special class for Youth, who also took a full part in the School's life. And finally there were organised group discussions, chaired by clergymen and not by tutors, so that each group might consider about its play: “Is this the Word?”

It was a happy week, and a valuable one, and the dedication in worship was never forgotten—this was the most striking thing to a newcomer like me. There was no opportunity at the end for the students to express their united thanks, to the organisers, the chaplains, the tutors, the visiting lecturers, the domestic staff of Culham College itself—and this I am now most delighted to do. But Miss Keily and Mr. Hogben deserve our special gratitude, and this is certainly felt, by all the students, now scattered back across the world.

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CORRESPONDENCE

THE EDITOR,
"Christian Drama."

DEAR SIR,

I was most interested in Alan Wilson's article in the Summer *Christian Drama* on "Producing Amateurs", and, while I think he is right in his assessment of the reasons which bring the majority of amateur actors into our productions, I feel that there may be more of his "group one" than he accounts for. There are those to whom acting is the breath of life but who know very well that they are not talented enough to make a living in the professional field. In their case I fancy that the structure is reversed and *they* demand much from the *producer*. To be let off with anything less than the final possible perfection, to be allowed to develop a character only so far, to be fobbed off with the slightest suspicion of an "oh, that will do" attitude—this is death to their enthusiasm and talent. They may even in the end—God forbid!—accept the lower standard.

The producer of an amateur company has many different types of people to contend with and will inevitably need all his wisdom and insight to tell one from t'other. But—oh, never let him forget that there might be a thirsty soul in one of them!

Yours sincerely,

MARGARET D. SMITH.

TRAINING

CARINA ROBINS

Easter Holidays

We are planning a residential week-end course on CREATIVE DRAMA from April 7th to 9th, 1961, at Passfield Hall, Endsleigh Place, London, W.C. 1. The principal tutor is to be our friend Stephen Joseph. This is the first time that we have organised a residential week-end in London, and we hope it will be crowded out.

Summer Holidays

Our annual residential Summer Course will be at St. Mary's College, Bangor, North Wales from August 1st to 10th, 1961, and it will be planned for the encouragement of many kinds of contemporary Christian Theatre.

In addition to all those who are in any way interested in the subject we are making special arrangements for families with young children, teenagers, and youth leaders.

The college stands high up overlooking Beaumaris Bay and the Menai Straits, and Bangor makes an ideal centre for a holiday.

Leaflets giving particulars about both the Easter and Summer courses will be ready in January.

Short Courses

Miss Ursula Nicholl gave a series of lectures in the summer to Y.M.C.A. secretaries-in-training, and she will give another such series this winter. Mr. Suter tutored a week-end school in Leicestershire in September.

The following courses are now being planned:

Bletchingley, November 5th-6th; Muswell Hill, January 28th, 1961; Meopham, February 3rd-4th; Tunbridge Wells, April 22nd.

Youth Leaders

A training course in dramatic work designed to meet the needs of those working with young people is being held each Friday evening from September to December at the Y.M.C.A., London. This is organised by our Youth Adviser, Mrs. Nutman and the principal tutors are Graham Suter and James Dodding. Twenty-four

students are taking part. The course has given us excellent opportunity of establishing relations with national youth organisations, and we hope that if this London experiment proves successful similar courses can be planned in other parts of England.

Clubs

Mr. Alan Wilson is doing dramatic work in a club at Streatham, Mr. Suter at Welling, and Miss E. Smith in Holborn.

All this youth work is made possible by a grant from the King George Jubilee Trust.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

NEW PLAYS

All In the Team. P. M. WEBB. (Methodist Missionary Society, 9d.) H. 8 scenes (30 mins.). Large cast of adults and children.

Missionary scenes illustrating the work of the J.M.A. (No fee.)

The Book of Job. ORLIN COREY. (Children's Theatre Press, Kentucky.) Continuous action. 5m., 5w.

A highly stylised arrangement of the Book of Job for the stage, using the words of the Authorised Version only; originally produced in the open air and in churches in the U.S.A., with formal "mosaic" costumes and make-up. (Fee: apply publishers.)

The Cedar Tree. PAUL BOOTH. (The Olive Press, 1/6.) H. 1 act (3 scenes). 3m., 2w.

A Jew returned from a concentration camp is haunted by the memory of a German Christian who died there to save him, and on Passover Night this example converts him to Christianity. (Fee: apply Editorial Secretary, 16 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, W.C. 2.)

Frost at Midnight. ANDRÉ OBEY. (French, 6/-.) H. 2 acts. 8m., 1w. Translated from the French, into an English medieval setting.

A group of men are assembled in the empty town hall to rehearse the Nativity play, which is always given at midnight on Christmas Eve. The usual stresses and strains are crowned by the loss of the player of the Madonna. The youngest of the company, however, has seen the ideal woman for the part, in the town. She, it is discovered, is Alice, "barmaid" at the tavern; but as she does well, and wants to help, the company are persuaded to let her act.

Subsequent events lead to the boycotting of the play by the self-righteous townsfolk, and the bitter disillusionment of the idealistic boy.

At last, the "Ox" and the "Ass" are the only people left in the hall at midnight. There may be no audience, and hardly any cast; but they can offer their parts to God in silence, nonetheless. (Fee: £5. 5s., £4. 4s.)

The Girl in the Snow. MARY NEILD. (Epworth Press, 1/6.) H. 1 act. 4w., 1 boy or girl, carollers. (Modern Christmas play.) (Fee: 5/-)

Jack Adams. JAMES BRABAZON. (Typescript.) H. 2 acts. Total cast of twenty-six or more. (Doubling possible.)

A modern morality play, written for a large number of amateurs to perform at the opening of a new theatre.

Its picture of a man who must be justified by success at all costs is a timely one, and the prose writing is both lively and tart. For a detailed review, see in *Far and Wide*. (Fee: apply Margaret Ramsay, Ltd.)

A King Will Come. R. A. DICK. (Evans Plays, 1/9.) H. 1 act. 9m., 1w.

A Nativity play in straightforward prose. (Fee: £1. 1s.)

CHRISTIAN DRAMA

Light from a New Window. D. DOUGLAS LORD. (Typescript.) H. 1 act. 7w.

Disagreement rages in a meeting of the women of the parish to consider a modernistic design for a new stained-glass window. It is a girl of fourteen who goes to the heart of the matter. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

The Light of Men. KENNETH PENFOLD. (Evans Plays, 1/9.) HX. 11 scenes (continuous). 12m., 3w., extras. A Nativity play. (Fee: £1. 1s.)

Master John Knox. ROBERT KEMP. (St. Andrew's Press, 15/-.) H. 26 scenes (continuous). Large mixed cast.

Commissioned to mark the fourth Centenary of the Reformation by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

In a series of verse scenes, to be played without a break on an open stage, we see Knox principally as a public figure, in conflict with the Regent Mary of Guise, and then with her daughter Mary, Queen of Scots. (Fee: apply publishers.)

Melchior. P. B. MACE. (Epworth Press, 1/6.) H. 1 act. 5m., 2w. Verse.

The old King, once one of the three Wise Men, is dying without news or hope of the Christchild he once visited. The story of the Passion and the Resurrection is brought to him, and he dies in happiness. (Fee: 7/6, 5/-.)

On Bethlehem's Hill. DOROTHY M. FISK. (Typescript.) H. Continuous action. 6m., Chorus of Angels. A Nativity play. (Fee: apply author.)

The Penny that Worked. CYRIL J. DAVEY. (Methodist Missionary Society, 8d.) H. 5 scenes (20 mins.). 7m., 3w., 1 boy.

A playlet telling how even one penny solved a problem for a missionary. (No fee.)

Room for Them All. P. M. WEBB. (Methodist Missionary Society, 6d.) H. 1 scene (20 mins.). 1w., 6 boys, 10 girls.

A simple missionary demonstration. (No fee.)

The Sign of Jonah. GUENTER RUTENBORN; tr. from the German by GEORGE WHITE. (Thos. Nelson, New York, \$1.) H. 9 scenes. 9m., 2w.

A tense discussion-drama set in "a theatre in West Berlin". Jonah is a German ex-submarine captain, who raises the question of responsibility for the sufferings of World War Two, before a Court of four Archangels. Average German citizens, and "the Queen of the South", representing any corrupt human State, give their testimony. They confess their part in building the "fiery furnaces" of our day, but claim their place in the sin of all mankind—each man both murderer and victim. God is condemned by the Court; "Mary . . . shall bring God into the world, under suspicion of shame—and as a Jew . . . to walk the earth unprotected . . ." and share the helplessness of the humanity he has made.

But that has really happened; and Nineveh listened to Jonah's teaching. Repentance and life are still possible to man. (Fee: apply Kurt Hellmer, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York 17.)

The Sun Was Darkened. RAYMOND CHAPMAN. (Typescript.) XH. Continuous action. 5m., 1w.

The story of the Passion, seen through the eyes of some of the chief Roman and Jewish participants, and showing how guilt is shared by all types of people. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

Take Your Pick. CYRIL J. DAVEY. (Methodist Missionary Society, 9d.) H. 1 act (30 mins.). 1m., 4w., 1 girl, other children. Missionary play (India). (No fee.)

Teleconfusion. DESMOND MOREY. (Typescript.) H. 1 act. 8m., 5w.

An experimental street play, burlesquing well-known TV programmes. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

The Three-Sighted. H. M. WILSON. (Typescript.) H. 1 act. 9 Voices.

A dialogue of the Voices of the evil spirits dogging the steps of Christ and reporting to their headquarters. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

Transition. DORA HAWKINS. (Highway Press, 1/6.) H. 3 scenes (30 mins.). 5m., 2w. Missionary play on Sierra Leone. (No fee.)

A Tune on the White Notes. CYRIL J. DAVEY. (Methodist Missionary Society, 9d.) H. 1 scene (45 mins.) 7w.

A discussion on the life of Dr. Aggrey, at a Women's Work meeting. (No fee.)

Whom Shall We Send? JOY HAWTHORN. (S.P.G., 1/-.) H. 1 scene. Large cast (3 main groups of children). S.P.G. Missionary Demonstration. (No fee.)

REFERENCE BOOKS

The Living Theatre. ELMER RICE. (Heinemann, 21/-.)

A comprehensive personal view by the well-known American playwright of the state of the professional theatre in the U.S.A., with chapters on his experience of theatre in Japan and Russia.

The Open Stage. RICHARD LEACROFT. (Reprinted from the *Architectural Review*.)

A discussion of the various forms of open or arena staging, with photographs and diagrams of such theatres as the Mermaid and the Studio Theatre.

Stage Lighting for the Amateur Producer. ANGUS WILSON. (Pitman, 7/6.)

A really helpful handbook, specially intended for the producer who is no expert on lighting, but wants to know how to get the best out of the man in charge of the lights (referred to throughout as "Joe"—highly skilled or just willing, every group has met him).

The Rev. Peter Bullock-Flint has appended an excellent practical chapter on lighting plays in churches.

Thoroughly recommended.

FAR AND WIDE

Barking, Essex

Authoress Joyce Biddell, just back from Austria, made a special journey to Barking on September 9th, to watch a performance of her play *They that sow in tears* . . . performed by Barking's Christian Youth Players. In her remarks to the audience afterwards, she commented how enthralled she was to watch it for the first time, and how beautifully it had been presented.

This play has tremendous opportunities, in depicting the tense excitement and the drama of the Hungarian uprising, and when one overcame the possible youth of the cast there were moments of inspired acting. Costumes, lighting and scenery were very good, though background music could possibly have been better.

Miss Biddell went backstage afterwards, and after congratulating the cast, told them she had just left a refugee lad, who was typically "Arpad" of the play. Sad, disillusioned, with little or no money to pay his way, he was typical

of the refugees of to-day. Many of them have moved into better flats, but the rents are so high that they are hardly any better off than they were before. The Players took note of this young refugee and at the next meeting of the Barking Council of Christian Youth hope to be able to send some small relief to him.

D. M. W.

* * *

Canterbury

At this year's Canterbury Cathedral Festival the Festival Players, a group of actors drawn from drama societies in the district, gave performances of *The Deluge* from the Chester Cycle, and *Everyman* in the Chapter House.

There were no properties in *The Deluge*, mime was used throughout, and one could not help missing the dove on the fishing rod and the wooden rainbow, to which one has become accustomed. Perhaps the players felt a little overpowered by their surroundings for,

though they brought great spirit and conviction to their parts, there was lacking the spontaneous gaiety and piety of a cart performance.

The Chapter House provided just the right setting for *Everyman*, and the morality was presented with dignity; Everyman himself giving a fine performance.

On the Festival Day for Youth, Mr. Martin Browne giving an introductory talk, explaining to the audience that they were not about to witness just museum pieces, but plays containing eternal verities. He helped the youthful audience to get into the minds of those who wrote, and those who originally performed the plays, pointing out that laughter and religion were not incompatible to those whose lives were rooted in the Faith. Certainly this went home, for shouts of delighted laughter greeted the antics of Noah's family. The greatest tribute to the performance of these plays was the fact that the attention of the young people was held throughout and the tales were followed with the deepest interest. K. B-B.

* * *

Christchurch, New Zealand

Christ in the Concrete City was produced in Christchurch Cathedral by Wendy de la Bere, in April this year, and afterwards in Wellington, for the Christchurch Religious Drama Society. This production was a great success, and the Cathedral was packed.

The scene was set in "the City of Infamy, sometimes here and now, sometimes there and then," and the players wore brilliantly coloured modern clothes—Teddy-boy exaggerated styles which in the Cathedral were not too flamboyant. The play moves from a modern city (in this production a coffee bar plays an important part) back through time to the Trial and Passion of Christ.

The production concentrated on movement and rigid discipline in the use of cloaks, etc., and a nearness to ballet was evident throughout.

* * *

Marfield, Yorks.

Noah by André Obey.

The Quarry Play is an annual event—part of the Commemoration Day celebrations of the Community of the Resurrection. The play is done by Ferdinand students from the Community's Hostel in Leeds University.

The quarry seats some 3,000 people. Below the fifty-foot quarry face of red rock is a good wide stage and on it, with the aid of some tarpaulin and sea-going rope, the suggestion of the ark.

I must admit to some misgivings before the event. Would amateurs be able to hold such an audience in the open air? And the weather—there must be a good deal of weather in a play about Noah—grey skies would have been realistic but dreary; one good storm will scatter the audience; but this blue sky will destroy all illusion of the Flood. And then, all those animals . . . ? But I had not seen a Pamela Keily production before, nor did I know the play. It is a very good play and particularly good for playing in the open. The characters are rough hewn but alive, the humour broad enough but not forced, and there is plenty of tension—there must have been plenty of tension, cooped up in the Ark (no exercise for the boys, no fresh vegetables, no proper kitchen, Noah and his Voice of God . . . and all those animals!).

Of course "the play centres on the unique character of Noah. It needs a very good actor for this part, a man with weight and breadth, for it is an exacting and tiring role which calls for generosity, friendliness and power . . ." (*Michel Saint-Denis*). Robert Horsfield quarried his Noah out of solid granite and carved it in fine, strong lines. Mamma was rightly of local sand-stone rather than alabaster, and Ham of sharp, angular flint. The boys and girls, likely carvings of a more domestic stature, the Man and those animals—gargoyles, agile and, thank Heaven, mute (full marks for the masks)—brought us great drops of rain, tempest and drizzle, mist and wind, and all from a cloudless sky. So much so that when they desert the old man and leave him alone on the rocks really you feel that it's the end. Which, of course, it is—except that you had forgotten the voice of God—and the Rainbow. "That's fine," says Noah. "Amen," said I.

G. BEAUMONT.

* * *

Mondsee, Austria

Many readers of *Christian Drama* will have seen the production of *Everyman* which has been so prominent a

feature of the Salzburg Festival ever since Reinhardt first produced it there in 1921. Few even *know* that the same play is put on every year in the little town of Mondsee only a few miles away. This performance is by amateurs. It has no great Cathedral Square as its setting. The open-air, terraced stage is backed by trees and furnished with the barest of benches and trestle tables. Yet quite a number of people find the Mondsee version the more impressive. I was one of a party who had an opportunity to compare these two widely differing productions.

The Mondsee *Everyman* is basically Hofmannsthal's version as used at Salzburg. But it is a *peasant adaptation of the Hofmannsthal text*. The earthly characters—Everyman, his servants, his friends and relations—all speak in the local dialect. They wear the traditional costumes of that part of the country. The feast from which Death summons Everyman is no period banquet, but a thoroughly jolly village party, with the lads in *lederhosen* and the girls in *dirndls*, dancing and singing and drinking beer to the accompaniment of their own town band. The whole scene was wonderfully colourful and *alive*. Familiar with this type of village festivity, the players were in their element. Little wonder then that their acting was so vital. Little wonder that the summons of Death came with a quite especial solemnity in the middle of this gay scene.

The introduction of the Devil, by the way, is a Hofmannsthal interpolation. As readers will know, the Hofmannsthal version sticks very close to the original in some parts. Where it does deviate, the alterations aim at strengthening the play's theatrical and human appeal. The Devil, storming on to the stage through the auditorium, brandishing his pitchfork, is first-class "theatre" (especially as produced in Mondsee, with ranks of white-robed angels barring his way wherever he tries to get through). The elaboration of the banquet scene, too, is partly aimed at theatrical effect. Additional figures are introduced, Everyman's Mistress, his servants, the Debtor (with wife and children) and the Beggar. Most striking of all is Everyman's Mother who pleads with him to give up his dissolute life. All these characters increase the human appeal of the story. Played with deep feeling, as they were in

Mondsee by the ordinary working folk of the town, they built up a vivid picture not only of Everyman as a real person but of that life of pleasure which had so great a hold on him when the summons of Death came.

I myself was fortunate enough to see the performance again some weeks later, this time on a perfect summer night. My impressions were unchanged. The production is one I shall never forget. True, there was nothing modern or experimental about it. I think not worse of it for that. Rather, its lack of sophistication was the very heart of its success.

ALISON GRAHAM-CAMPBELL.

* * *

Oxford University Religious Drama Players

Last summer, it occurred to some of us who had been concerned with dramatics at Oxford University that it was time that some of the Christians active in this sphere applied their knowledge to religious drama—good, exciting, challenging religious drama. What better than to go touring during the Long Vacation?

As we wanted to make the tour something in the way of a mission, we insisted that everybody who came with us must be a practising Christian, for otherwise he would not be able to join with us fully in our activities. The party eventually consisted of Anglicans, Baptists, Congregationalists and Methodists. We found that theological differences were no bar to our working together. It is no exaggeration to say that the common tie with Christ was the bond which united the company.

We sought a play with an obvious message, a task which we found more difficult than we had anticipated. Eventually we hit upon Philip Turner's *Cry Dawn in Dark Babylon*; which seemed to offer sufficient scope for production while being within the capabilities of our actors. As a curtain-raiser and "light relief" we chose *The World and the Child*, a sixteenth-century morality interlude.

When at last all the bookings were made, we were to start at Coventry Cathedral, travelling up the west coast of Lancashire to Kirkby Lonsdale, then across the moors to Ilkley, south to Huddersfield, across the Pennines to Manchester, and then through Cheshire

to Chester: some 700 miles in all. We travelled in an ex-army ambulance, while scenery, etc., was loaded into a 5-cwt. van, so that we looked rather like a miniature circus as we travelled in convoy.

Before the tour, we met once a week for prayers, and much of the success of it can be attributed to this.

We played in both halls and churches. While it can be argued that the church is the proper setting (it certainly has more "atmosphere"), we found that often the acoustics were very poor and there was not really acting space. Rather more serious was that the mere act of being in a church subdued the audience, so that we found it difficult to gauge their reaction. Also in some places we had to act very far back from the audience, thus losing the feeling of intimacy. Church halls of course were usually reasonable, though a surprising number possessed no blackout. There was to me, however, no doubt that in a hall it was very much easier to forget that this was *religious* drama, and treat it as just another play.

Rather surprisingly, the play made the least think deeply about many problems that one had never thought of before, that one could not answer, and lines instantly took on a new significance.

What will live? We were certainly welcomed by the various ministers, and afterwards they all seemed very glad that we had come. I am convinced that for no other reason, this was because our drama had a purpose, it was not just drama for drama's sake. People were also pleased to find interesting religious drama, as did one minister who came from a sense of duty, fully expecting to be as bored as he had been at so many other similar functions, but found every moment well worth while.

B. A. HANDS.

* * *

Sadlers Wells Theatre, E.C. 1. "The Finsbury Story"

However one may love history the prospect of an historical pageant can be daunting: the news then that the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury was to produce such a work in its local theatre (which is *not* in Islington as so many think) was to be received with mixed feelings. Yet what an amazing work it turned out to be this *Finsbury Story*. It covered in microcosm the

range of English history from the Conquest to the present day in a series of scenes linked by narration. The ones I best remember are the mimed Black Death, pike drill by the Honourable Artillery Company, the ascent of the first English balloon, Grimaldi on the stage of the old Sadlers Wells (played now with gusto by a street trader from the neighbouring Chapel Market) a jolly, slow-motion comedy scene set at a Home for Women redeemed from Vice, the arrival of gaslight in Finsbury Square, and the images of former residents Carlisle, Beardsley and Lenin presented in suggestion of famous portraits.

The enormous cast was almost entirely amateur, local residents in fact, working with a professional director, script-writer, designer, composer and choreographer. The narration was spoken by Ernest Milton, whose superb profile was quietly observable in the narrator's corner to provide an alternative spectacle during some of the more turgid passages—which were mercifully few. This actor's evocative traditional style blended unhappily with the naturalistic playing around him, though when left to himself in the closing moments he delivered the best of his lines with poetic beauty.

As is our history in general *The Finsbury Story* was shot through with religious references, to the foundation and destruction of the great monastic houses of St. John and St. Mary, to the Carthusian Martyrs, to the secret Jesuit College in Clerkenwell, to George Fox and John Wesley (not to mention Lilian Baylis herself!).

Everyone concerned in this valiant adventure is to be congratulated on what was attempted and in large measure achieved; not least the permanent staff of Sadlers Wells, who must surely have been sorely tested by this three-week invasion of several hundred enthusiastic amateurs.

J. HESTER.

* * *

Scunthorpe, Lincs.

Jack Adams; a play by James Brabazon; specially commissioned by Scunthorpe's Drama Federation.

This play had to be extraordinary! Good quality production of ordinary plays had already been given by dramatic societies in Scunthorpe, so that when

they resolved to unite, it called for a play which would extend the combined resources of all societies, and it was hoped that by a bold approach, they would contribute something to the world of drama as a whole.

With this in mind and broad terms of reference, James Brabazon, the playwright, set about his task, and chose to set his plot in London as we know it to-day. The main character, Jack Adams, shows one aspect of contemporary man faced with the problems of the Space Age. The playwright faces reality, and as Jack aims to be the first man on the moon, we see some of the problems to be faced by a society that looks to science for all the answers. In the final, well-written scene set on the top of St. Paul's Cathedral, we find Jack seeking to find some justification for his life and for once we are taken away from this modern materialistic world and given a glimpse of something more eternal.

The play is in two acts with a total of twenty short scenes depicting various aspects of Jack's life, through which we are taken to Fleet Street, a cannibal club, a "cool chick" cellar and even a cabinet meeting. Such is the scope, the language and lesson of the play that it has something for everyone, young and old, actor and audience alike.

This play provided an experience from which the dramatic societies of Scunthorpe have derived tremendous benefit, but it should not be thought that the play is for either the inexperienced or the unimaginative. It is a challenge and this was accepted by John Crockett, the producer, and all who worked with him in Scunthorpe. The undoubted success of the production was due, in no small measure, to a brilliant producer, and the excellent co-operation between producer and playwright. During rehearsals, each was sufficiently flexible to accept suggestions from the other and in minor ways

the original play was modified to suit local conditions and talent.

Such close co-operation between producer and playwright is something which could, with advantage, be developed in the professional theatre. As a further pointer to the future, Brabazon is suggesting a new dramatic form. Although the play reminds us in part of the morality plays and Shakespeare it is refreshing to see all the arts of the modern theatre combined to provide a wonderful theatrical experience. Brabazon breaks down artificial barriers and no doubt looks forward to the day when the best from the world of drama—music, art, dancing, etc., can combine to give us the perfect play.

B. PRICE.

* * *

Sheffield

Amateur dramatic talent can be put to various uses, but it is seldom employed to better effect, or under more rigorous imaginative discipline, than it prevails in a performance directed by Miss Pamela Keily for the Sheffield Religious Drama organisation. An excellent example of this work can be seen this week (June 13th-18th) at the Carver Street Methodist Hall, where Miss Keily's players appear in Norman Nicholson's *Birth by Drowning*.

This play is the Cumberland poet's sequel to his *Old Man of the Mountains* and the scene is again in the northern country fells.

Individual subtleties matter less than the broad emphasis of the production—and there are times when emphasis might perhaps have been tempered with a little more naturalism. . . .

Many amateur actors are busy elsewhere this week, but there are none who would not profit by a visit to this stimulating and exemplary production.

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Sheffield Telegraph

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